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THE SANDMAN™

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FOR MATURE
READERS

the DOLL'S HOUSE part 3

GAIMAN • BACHALO • JONES

LYTA IS RUDELY PULLED FROM HER REVERIE BY THE ALARM, WHICH ECHOES AND CLANGS THROUGH THE DREAM DOME.

SHE TRIES TO REMEMBER WHAT SHE WAS THINKING ABOUT, AND, FAILING, RESOLVES TO GO AND TALK TO HER HUSBAND.

HE'LL KNOW.

HECTOR KNOWS EVERYTHING.

AROUND HER THE ALARM SYSTEM WHOOPS AND SHRILLS. ANOTHER EMERGENCY.

HECTOR SEEMS TO WORK SO MUCH THESE DAYS. AND THEY NO LONGER MAKE LOVE.

SHE CAN'T BLAME HIM, OF COURSE.

SHE WOULDN'T WELCOME HIS ADVANCES IF HE MADE THEM. NOT IN HER DELICATE CONDITION.

STILL, WHEN THE CHILD IS BORN, THINGS WILL BE DIFFERENT, WON'T THEY?

MUMMY, AND DADDY AND BABY MAKES THREE...

OH.

SHE MUST REMEMBER TO ASK HECTOR ABOUT THAT...

CONVERSION BY WILDSTORM

WHOOPWHOOPWHOOPWHOOP

IT'S A TEN ALARM *NIGHTMARE* AND IT'S HEADING THIS WAY!

BETTER BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES, TEAM-- *THIS* IS GOING TO BE A *DOOZY!*

BRUTE, GLOB, EITHER OF YOU GUYS SEEN ANYTHING LIKE *THIS* BEFORE?

UHH, SURE, YEAH, *WE* KNOW WHAT DAT IS. MISTER SANFORD, DA *FOIST* SANDMAN, HE HAD A BATTLE WIT' DIS GUY WUNST. IT'S CALLED, *UH...*

THE NIGHTMARE MONSTER. IT'S A TERRIBLE CREATURE FROM THE, *UH,* UNDER--*ID.*

ONE OF YOUR HEREDITARY FOES.

THEN I'LL HAVE TO SHOW IT WHAT THE *NEW* SANDMAN IS *MADE* OF.

ISN'T THAT *RIGHT,* HONEY?

HECTOR?

I'M SORRY, HECTOR, I WAS THINKING... THINKING ABOUT SOMETHING. I'M SORRY...

LISTEN, YOU TWO -- THAT THING'LL BE HERE SOON, SO GET ME ANY FILES ON IT WE HAVE.

HECK! WE WERE DUE TO TAKE LITTLE JED TO THE CIRCUS IN THE STARS TONIGHT.

IF IT TAKES MORE THAN A COUPLE OF HOURS TO THRASH THIS CRITTER WE'LL HAVE TO PUT THAT OFF UNTIL TOMORROW NIGHT...

OKAY, BOSS.

GOT IT.

COME ON, MRS. SANDMAN, I'LL WALK YOU BACK TO OUR QUARTERS.

UH, HECTOR...

YOU WON'T BE IN ANY DANGER, WILL YOU?

HONEY, YOU'RE TALKING TO THE MAN WHO RESCUED THE TOOTH FAIRY FROM THE JOVIAN FISH-MEN. WHO STOPPED THE BIG BAD WOLF FROM HUFFING DOWN THE CHRYSLER BUILDING...

NOBODY EVER BEATS THE SANDMAN.

EVERYTHING is going to be just FINE.

DARLING... HOW LONG HAVE WE BEEN LIVING IN THE DREAM DOME?

MUST BE A COUPLE OF YEARS BY NOW, HON. *WHY?*

WELL, IT JUST SEEMED TO ME LIKE, MAYBE I OUGHT TO HAVE *HAD* A *BABY* BY NOW.

I *WAS* ABOUT SIX MONTHS PREGNANT WHEN WE GOT HERE...

YOU KNOW, YOU COULD JUST *HAVE* SOMETHING THERE, BABYCAKES. *HMM.*

YOU KNOW, PRECIOUS, I'LL BET THAT THE *STORK* DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO *GET* TO THE *DREAM DOME*. HE'S PROBABLY GOT OUR LITTLE BUNDLE OF JOY IN ITS WHITE COTTON DIAPER, RIGHT *NOW.*

OH.

I'LL TELL BRUTE AND GLOB ABOUT IT. *THEY'LL* KNOW HOW TO GET A MESSAGE TO THAT OL' STORK. *YOU'LL* SEE.

I'LL TALK TO THEM RIGHT AFTER I'VE BEATEN THE NIGHTMARE MONSTER.

BE CAREFUL.

LYTA LIVES IN A PRETTY HOUSE, WITH HER HUSBAND, THEIR TWO SERVANTS, AND A THOUSAND THOUSAND SCREENS.

PLAYING HOUSE

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SHE HAS ALL THE DRESSES SHE CAN WEAR, AND A HUSBAND WHO HAS A VERY IMPORTANT JOB.

HECTOR IS THE SANDMAN. WITH HIS TWO ASSISTANTS, BRUTE AND GLOB, HE GIVES ALL THE CHILDREN IN THE WORLD WONDERFUL DREAMS.

ALL THE CHILDREN...?

THE ONLY CHILD LYTA HAS ACTUALLY MET IN THE DREAM-WORLD IS CALLED JED.

JED COMES TO VISIT THEM ALL THE TIME.

NOBODY ELSE.

IN HER DREAM HOUSE, IN HER PRETTY DRESSES, LYTA DOESN'T THINK ABOUT ANYTHING MUCH ANY MORE.

BUT SOMETIMES...

SOMETIMES SHE ALMOST WONDERS WHY.

NOW *YOU* LISSEN *UP*, YA LITTLE *ANIMAL*, AN *YOU* LISSEN *GOOD*, NOW.

NEXT WEEK, SOMEONE'S GOING TO COME FROM THE WELFARE DEPARTMENT TO SEE HOW YOU'RE *DOIN'*.

SEE IF THEY'RE GETTIN' THEIR *MONEY'S WORTH* OUTTA YA.

SO WE'RE GONNA *CLEAN* YA *UP*, AND BRING YA UP OUTTA THE CELLAR. AND *YOU'RE* GONNA SHOW HER BARNABY JUNIOR'S ROOM AND MAKE OUT IT'S YOURS,

AND TELL HER HOW *WELL* WE FEED YOU AND ALL.

AND *NONE* OF YOUR *LYING* OR *CARRYING ON*, BOY.

FEEL *THIS*? *HUH*? *DO YA*?

OOG.

WELL, YOU SAY *ANYTHING* TO THIS WELFARE SNOOPER ABOUT THE CELLAR, OR *ANYTHING* GOES ON IN THIS HOUSE...

AND *I'M* GONNA WIRE YOUR HANDS TO THE PIPES DOWN THERE, AND PROCEED TO BREAK *EVERY* BONE IN YOUR *BODY*.

ONE BY ONE BY ONE.

NOW, *GIT!*

CLARICE AND BARNABY RECEIVE $800 A MONTH FROM THE STATE FOR JED. THREE YEARS AGO HE RAN AWAY.

SINCE THEN HE'S BEEN LOCKED IN THE BASEMENT.

BARNABY AND CLARICE SEE IT AS PROTECTING THEIR INVESTMENT. THEY KNOW IT'S IMPORTANT TO KEEP JED SAFE...

THEY JUST COULDN'T TELL YOU WHY.

WHAT'S KEEPING THIS DUMB NIGHTMARE MONSTER, *HUH*, BRUTE, OLD PAL?

DUH. I DUNNO, BOSS.

IT *IS* HIM, ISN'T IT. *LORD MO--*

SHUT *UP*, SCAB-BRAIN! HIS *NAME* COULD GIVE HIM IMMEDIATE ENTRY HERE!

SORRY... BUT IT *IS* HIM, ISN'T IT?

WHO ELSE?

SO FAR THE BARRIERS ARE HOLDING. IF HE BREAKS THEM HE KILLS THE KID, AND HE CAN'T DO THAT. *RULES*.

SO IT BUYS US A LITTLE TIME WHILE HE WORMS HIS WAY IN.

I'M *BEGINNING* TO THINK WE SHOULD HAVE STUCK WITH THE *LAST* ONE. HALL'S EVEN DUMBER THAN SANFORD WAS.

IT TAKES SOME DOING, BUT HE IS.

SAY, GUYS, DO YOU THINK THIS NIGHTMARE MONSTER'S GOING TO BE A TOUGHER BATTLE THAN THE SKELETON MEN FROM PLUTO?

DO YOU?

DO YOU?

I am coming.

I am coming through the barriers you have erected in this mind.

I am coming, though the way be arduous and strange.

Nothing will stop me.

As I travel, I admire the craftsmanship in the construction of this maze, admire the traps and pitfalls they have wrought.

You have learned well, my servants.

This takes skill.

To force the child to construct these barriers inside its mind, in its effort to escape the physical world; to build an island of dream alone and untouched by the true Dreaming...

My admiration does not lessen my anger.

I am dream.

I am coming.

LIVING IN A DREAM HOUSE, WITH A DREAM HUSBAND AND...

LYTA LOSES HER TRAIN OF THOUGHT, AND COMMENCES ABSENTLY TO BRUSH HER HAIR.

IS THIS WHAT SHE WANTS?

IS THIS WHAT SHE WANTED?

SHE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE WITH HECTOR. EVEN WHEN THEY WERE CHILDREN, WHEN SHE WAS A STRONG RICH KID AND HE WAS A HERO BRAT...

BUT SHE MUST HAVE WANTED MORE THAN THAT.

MUSTN'T SHE?

BUT HECTOR'S DREAMS CAME FIRST. THEY ALWAYS DID. LYTA AND HECTOR DID SO MUCH TOGETHER...

THEY CAME OUT OF THE CLOSET ON THE COSTUME STUFF TOGETHER. WHEN THEY WERE AT UCLA.

WHY DID SHE DO THAT? BECOME A CHEAP COPY OF HER VANISHED MOTHER?

IT ALL SEEMS LIKE A DREAM NOW. SO HARD TO HOLD ON TO. NOTHING'S TANGIBLE ANYMORE.

THERE WERE THE NIGHTMARE TIMES WHEN SHE THOUGHT HECTOR WAS DEAD.

WELL, TO BE FAIR, HE WAS DEAD...

AND SHE WAS PREGNANT WITH HIS CHILD.

BUT BRUTE AND GLOB HAD CAUGHT HIS SOUL IN THE DREAM DOME, MADE HIM THE SANDMAN, THE PROTECTOR OF DREAMS...

AND, AFTER THE WEDDING, SHE CAME TO LIVE IN THIS HOUSE.

AND SHE WAS VERY HAPPY. THEY WERE ALL SO VERY, VERY HAPPY.

HI, BABE. JUST CALLING IN TO SAY I'M OFF TO FIGHT THE NIGHTMARE MONSTER. BRUTE AND GLOB ARE GOING TO EJECT ME THROUGH THE DREAM CHUTE NOW.

THAT'S NICE, DEAR. HAVE A GOOD TIME.

NO.

NO, IT WOULD *NEVER* HAVE WORKED. BUT IT WAS *FUN* TO TRY.

WELL, THERE HE GOES. BYE-BYE BOZO.

NOW WHAT?

FESTERING *SCABS*! *PUS* AND *POX* AND *PUKE* ON IT ALL! WE CAME *SO* DAMNED CLOSE! JUST A *FEW* MORE YEARS.

IT *WOULD* HAVE WORKED.

SO...

DO WE SIT AND WATCH OUR OLD BOSS PULL THE BOZO'S HEAD OFF...?

OR SHALL WE FIND SOMEPLACE TO *LOSE* OURSELVES, AND START THE WHOLE THING OVER AGAIN?

SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, DODGE COUNTY, GEORGIA: ROSE WALKER.

WE'LL *NEVER* GET THIS THING STARTED AGAIN TONIGHT, GILBERT.

YOU *SAID* YOU WOULDN'T MENTION THAT AGAIN.

IT WAS YOU WHO CHOSE TO RENT A WRECK, MISS WALKER.

MY APOLOGIES, MISS WALKER.

WE MIGHT AS WELL WALK. IT CAN'T BE TOO FAR TO A MOTEL.

WHAT WAS THAT, THEN? TEN MILES? *FIFTEEN*?

PERHAPS A MILE AND A HALF, MISS WALKER.

YOU'RE NO FUN, GILBERT. ANYWAY, WITH *OUR* LUCK THEY'LL BE ALL BOOKED UP.

WELCOME CEREAL CONVENTION

WELL, I'M AFRAID WE *ARE* KINDA BOOKED UP, LITTLE LADY.

THIS *CONVENTION*, THEY'VE BOOKED THE WHOLE PLACE THROUGH THE WEEKEND.

I MEAN, I *GOT* EMPTY ROOMS, SINCE MOSTA THEM DON'T GET HERE TILL TOMORROW MORNING, BUT...

LOOK, WE'LL BE OUT FIRST THING TOMORROW. PROMISE.

AND WE WON'T GET IN THE WAY OF YOUR CEREAL GROWERS. OR EATERS. WHATEVER.

HONEST.

YOU'RE BOTH ON THE THIRD FLOOR. *311* AND *312*. I REALLY *SHOULDN'T* BE DOING THIS.

I KNOW. AND I *CAN'T* THANK YOU ENOUGH. NEITHER CAN COUSIN GILBERT.

"COUSIN GILBERT?"

"C'MON, GILBERT. LIGHTEN UP... SO WHAT DO YOU THINK CEREAL FANS ARE INTO, HUH? MAYBE THEY COLLECT THOSE LITTLE PLASTIC FIGURINES, AND OLD CAPTAIN CRUNCH WHISTLES..."

GUEST LIST

The Bone Girl
Brother Cleit
The California Widow
The Candyman
Christian
Cincinatti Oyster
The Corinthian (Kentucky)
The Devil (Oregon)
The Devil Dog Sauce
The Dutch Uncle
The Fagot Fur
The Fatality man
The Feather Fluther

ATLANTA, GEORGIA. THE CORINTHIAN.

HEY! YOU IN THE SHADES!

WORD ON THE STREET IS YOU'RE LOOKIN' FER A LITTLE ROUGH TRADE AN' EASY ACTION. ZAT SO?

COULD BE.

DON'T JERK US AROUN', GUY. ME AN' DOUGIE, HERE, WE MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN A THREESOME.

IF THE PRICE WUZ RIGHT.

I HAVE MONEY.

THAT IS SUCH GOOD NEWS, MAN. GOOD NEWS FOR US, ANYWAY.

TAKE HIM, DOUGIE!

SNICK

AAAGH! JEEZUS!

ASSHOLE! I'M GONNA RIP OUT YOUR EYES FOR THAT!

AIIIEEEEE!

MY FINGERS, MAN. O GOD. O GOD.

HIS EYES! JOE-BOB, LOOK AT HIS EYES!

HOLY SHIT, DOUGIE...

HE BIT OFF MY FINGERS WITH HIS EYES.

NOW, GENTLEMEN...

YOU'VE HAD YOUR FUN.

I THINK IT'S TIME FOR ME TO HAVE MINE.

MM. NICE KNIFE.

EASY ACTION.

COME ON, YOU DUMB NIGHTMARE MONSTER.

IT'S DEFEATING-THE-FORCES-OF-DARKNESS TIME!

I SEE MY SERVANTS HAVE A SERVANT OF THEIR OWN...

LITTLE GHOST.

LITTLE GHOST, GET OUT OF MY WAY.

THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING. .

THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING IN MY HEAD.

I'M SORRY.

I WON'T RUN AWAY ANYMORE. I'M SORRY. I'LL LET YOU DO ANYTHING YOU WANT TO ME. I'LL EVEN SMILE.

THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING IN MY HEAD. PLEASE LET ME OUT.

PLEASE.

AH.

HELLO?

BRUTE? GLOB?

HECTOR?

WHAT'S HAPPENING? IS SOMETHING HAPPENING?

I-I'M SCA-SCARED. THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING IN MY HEAD AND I'M FRIGHTENED...

HELL?

NO.

UH... HEAVEN?

DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH.

OK, I GOT IT. WE GET OUT OF THE DREAMING, WHILE HE'S BUSY WITH THE BOZO, CUT OPEN BARNABY AND CLARICE, SCOOP OUT THEIR INSIDES AND HIDE INSIDE THEIR SKINS.

HE'D *NEVER* THINK OF LOOKING FOR US THERE...

HE WOULD.

...YEAH. HE WOULD.

HOLD, FOUL NIGHTMARE CREATURE! OR I WILL DISPERSE YOUR FABRIC WITH MY ULTRA-SONIC WHISTLE!

TWEEEEP!

YOU TRY MY PATIENCE, LITTLE GHOST.

WHERE ARE YOUR MASTERS?

THAT DIDN'T *FAZE* YOU, HUH?

WELL, LET'S SEE HOW YOU REACT TO A CARTRIDGE OF *DREAM SAND!*

I CAN FEEL THEM, HIDING IN THAT PLACE. GET OUT OF MY WAY.

MONSTER, YOU SHALL NEVER GET PAST *ME*.

AND WHO ARE YOU...?

I AM THE *SANDMAN*, GUARDIAN OF THE DREAMS OF MEN, *PROTECTOR* AGAINST WICKED NIGHTMARES, *LORD* OF THE *DREAM DOME*, AND *FRIEND* OF *CHILDREN* EVERYWHERE!

YOU ARE WHAT?

HRRR.

HRR.

HRRRAAHH.

YOU...?

YOU ARE THE SANDMAN? IS *THAT* WHAT THEY TOLD YOU, LITTLE GHOST? *HRR.*

HRRAHHAHAHA.

HA HA HA HA HA HRRAHH HAHAHA!

OHHH, HUMANITY, I LOVE YOU.

You never cease to amaze me.

This has been amusing, little ghost, and that was not something I expected.

But every playtime must come to an end.

This dream is over.

MHH? CLARRIE? YOU HEAR THAT, HON? SOUNDED LIKE IT CAME FROM THE BASEMENT.

IF IT'S THAT LITTLE SCUM-SUCKER, WHEN I'M THROUGH WITH HIM, HE'S GONNA WISH HIS MA HAD HADDA ABORTION INSTEDDA HIM. I TELLYA--

Brute. Glob. Hello. I presume that this peculiar charade had some kind of purpose?

OHSHITOH-SHITOHSHITOH-SHITOHSHITOH-SHITOHSHIT-OH...

Well?

I am waiting for an explanation.

WELL, YOU WERE WAY OUT OF THE PICTURE, LORD. SO WE THOUGHT, HELL, YOU'D OBVIOUSLY BE AWAY FOR A WHILE, PERHAPS FOR A REAL *LONG* WHILE, SO WE COULD MAYBE MAKE OUR *OWN* DREAM KING. ONE *WE'D* BE RUNNING...

"WE HID IN THE KID'S DREAMS, AND WALLED IT OFF FROM THE REST OF THE DREAMING. THEN WE BEGAN TO MAKE A SAND-MAN.

"FIRST MORTAL WE USED, GARRETT SANFORD, HE CRACKED UP, KILLED HIMSELF. COULDN'T TAKE THE STRAIN."

WE THOUGHT, OKAY, NEXT TIME WE GET SOMEONE WHO'S DEAD TO *START* WITH.

SO WE HOOKED THE BOZO, TOLD HIM HE WAS THE NEW SANDMAN, AND HE BROUGHT HIS WIFE ALONG.

BUT THEN YOU PLAYED YOUR GET-OUT-OF-JAIL-FREE CARD, KIND OF EARLIER THAN WE EXPECTED. AND...

WELL...

HERE WE ALL ARE.

WHAT HAPPENS *NOW?*

I will clean up the mess you have created.

As for you two...

I doubt that either of you will enjoy the next few thousand years very much.

EVERYTHING SEEMS VERY DISTANT AND FAR AWAY, LIKE PERHAPS IT'S HAPPENING TO SOMEONE ELSE.

THIS CAN'T BE REAL: NOT THIS DANK CELLAR, ACRID TOILET-SMELL ON THE STALE AIR.

MAYBE SHE'S DREAMING.

NO! NOT THE DARKNESS! PLEASE, LORD!

IT WAS ALL IN FUN! WE MEANT NOTHING BY IT! PLEASE?

NOT THE DARKNESS!

There. That takes care of them, for now.

Hmm. Little ghost. Do you have a name?

SURE, FELLA. I'M HECTOR HALL, AND THIS IS MY WIFE, LYTA. SHORT FOR HIPPOLYTA.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS IS ALL *ABOUT* BUT...

It is unseemly for the dead to walk the earth, Hector Hall.

You belong with the dead, Little ghost. Go to the place appointed for you.

HUH? NOW, LISTEN, BUSTER--

LYTA!

NO. STOP HIM. FOR GOD'S SAKE...

I LOVE YOU...

HECTOR?

YOU KILLED HIM. YOU MONSTER.

No. No, he died a long time ago.

I would suggest that you count yourself lucky for having had two extra years with him, post mortem, instead of abusing me.

YOU KILLED HIM!

If you wish.

I will forgive you that. Your grief has affected your judgment.

But I should point out that there is an unborn child within you who might have been damaged.

I would not want to see the child hurt.

LYTA FEELS THE MUCK BENEATH HER, AND SHE KNOWS.

THIS IS NO DREAM.

THE OTHER LIFE. THE HOUSE. THE HUSBAND. THAT WAS THE DREAM.

SO. WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO ME?

Nothing.

NOTHING? YOU KILLED HECTOR. YOU DESTROYED OUR HOME. YOU'VE RUINED MY LIFE.

YOU CALL THAT NOTHING?

Exactly. Nothing.

You are free to go. Build yourself a new life, Hippolyta Hall.

Oh. I almost forgot. The child-- the child you have carried so long in dreams. That child is mine.

Take good care of it. One day I will come for it.

BUT, BUT, YOU CAN'T, MY BABY...

I have a prior engagement, I am afraid. I can discuss this no further.

YOU TAKE MY CHILD OVER MY DEAD BODY, YOU SPOOKY BASTARD...

OVER MY DEAD BODY.

I will see you again, Hippolyta.

Until then. Fare well.

YO, KID.

WHICH WAY YOU HEADING?

ANYWHERE.

I DON'T KNOW.

AWAY.

WELL, CLIMB IN. THAT'S WHERE I'M GOING.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME, KIDDO?

JED.

WHY ARE YOU WEARING THOSE THINGS? IT'S SO DARK. CAN YOU *SEE* OKAY?

SURE I CAN SEE, JED. I CAN SEE *EVERYTHING*.

I CAN SEE JUST *FINE*.

NEXT:

"MEN OF GOOD FORTUNE"

E
E
M
P
I
R
SON OF ULTRON